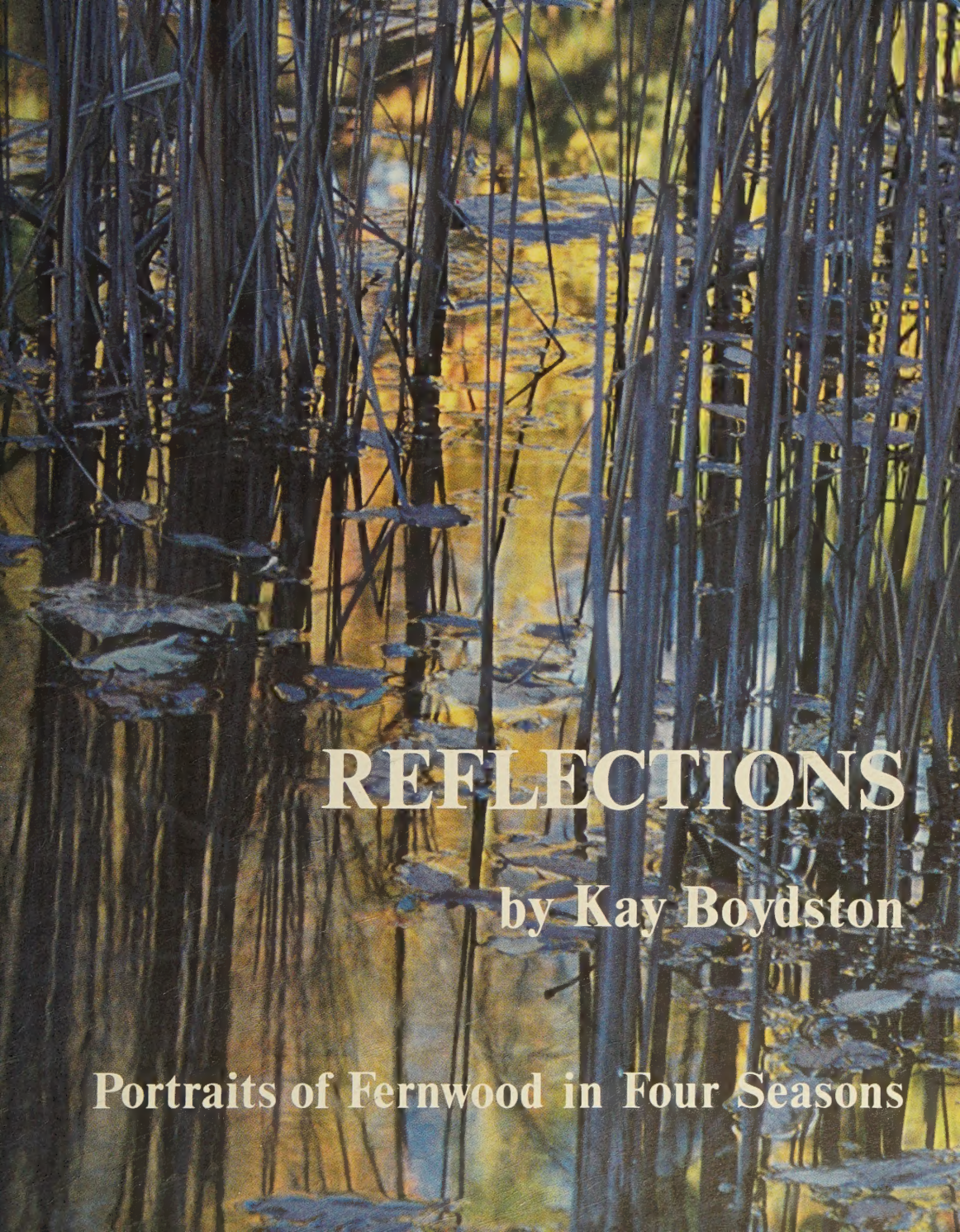

REFLECTIONS

by Kay Boydston

Portraits of Fernwood in Four Seasons

"Reflections" is a little book to pick up and browse through and re-read . . . the brief story of a family and a favorite place which could be anybody's found anywhere. For this reason it will have a general appeal to all who have had the fun of an expanding and growing-up family and to any who prefer woodland trails to cement sidewalks and bird watching to TV viewing.

It should, we think, appeal especially to Fernwood members and to Fernwood visitors, so many of whom write after being here, "We find it hard to describe Fernwood. It is truly a unique place. We wish there were another just like it in our town."

In these times of stress and changing values there is a basic need for all of us, young and old alike, to have some time to enjoy, study and understand the world we live in . . . in short, to become aware. The plan, principal purpose and total program of Fernwood is to open eyes, ears and hearts to these natural miracles around us every day, so many of them missed because of a lack of time, knowledge and awareness.

It will, perhaps, raise the spirits to reflect on the world we might have if there were many, many other small Fernwoods dotted close over the whole expanse of the U.S.A.

Jacket Cover:

When seen in the earliest morning with misty vapor rising eerily from the water or in the last pale light of the sunset's afterglow, this pond has a dreamy, mystic quality impossible to describe but quieting, uplifting to experience — the perfect end, or the beginning, of another day . . .

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REFLECTIONS

by Kay Boydston

A Salute ~

To those who have worked a lifetime to fulfill a dream — — — to keep a bit of wildness here — — — that those who follow after will find a sanctuary of peace where dreams and beauty mingle.

Reflections Rededicated

Second Printing

IN MEMORY OF

Kay Boydston

October 12, 1897 - February 6, 1988

"Once more the truth so strongly impressed on me today . . . is that perhaps the most precious thing about life which passes so swiftly, are the memories left along the way which return unbidden for pleasant reflection.

Like the reflected images of water, just so reflections of the past add pleasure to the present. Yet both are ephemeral and cannot be held static." K.E.B.

In her very own words, the Kay Boydston who was loved by all who knew her is now a reflection of the past — but adding pleasure to the present. Though the thoughts we hold for a moment are ephemeral and cannot be held static, like the seasons they return unbidden to us for a pleasant reflection of her.

Reflections

Portraits of Fernwood
in
Four Seasons

The purpose of assembling this little book of seasonal portraits of Fernwood has been three-fold:

To honor the memory of Mrs. Ernest E. Barber, who was the first to enthusiastically endorse the idea (introduced by Mr. Charles E. Mohr) that Fernwood become a preserve.

To acknowledge with gratitude the interest and generous support of Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence J. Plym to whom Mrs. Barber carried the idea.

To express appreciation to my husband, Walter, and to all members of our scattered family for their patient understanding when so often in these ten years my Fernwood duties had to take precedence over home-cooked meals and personal correspondence. The Reflections herein are for them especially.

Kay Boydston

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Paintings and line drawings by William Blackmun
Titles by Elaine Lee

Acknowledgments

William Blackmun has for ten years kept all communication from Fernwood Inc. on a high plane artistically — folders, maps, drawings and the illustrations for nearly one hundred issues of Fernwood Notes have come from his studio. His interest in Fernwood and exceptional talent to portray wild life have combined to strengthen the Fernwood purpose and carry its message. It is gratifying that this little book can bring four new paintings as well as many of his drawings made especially for Fernwood.

In addition, the design and layout for "Reflections" have been his work. Without him there could not have been any book at all.

Elaine Lee, through the same ten years, has kept Fernwood's bulletin boards and all special exhibits professionally attractive with her talent for lettering.

Ramona Hines with her excellent typing and careful proof reading has given fine help.

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- "Spring" from a photograph by ..... Clarence D. Cook
- "Summer" from a photograph by ..... Mildred Glueck Wells
- "Autumn" from a photograph by ..... Robert O. Joslin
- "Winter" from a photograph by ..... Frances Cook

Photographs in Color:
- "Autumn Reflections" (Jacket Cover) by ..... Robert O. Joslin
- "Spring Reflections" (Frontispiece) by ..... Don Harker
- "River Reflections" by ..... Robert O. Joslin

Photographs in Monochrome by ..... Erich Bruegmann

Foreword

Because of its reflected images and weather moods, water adds much to any scene. Just so, reflections of the past add pleasure to the present. Yet both are ephemeral and cannot be held static . . .

Here at Fernwood we are rich with so much water — with springs, streams, pools, a pond and the river. Each has cast its share of reflections on the lives of many folks.

Even in the black water of a mud puddle after rain, a blue sky, cloud studded, may be reflected. How many faces of happy children have been reflected in the trout pool as fish jump for the food tossed to them! The larger pond has a magnetic pull for everyone — children and adults alike — from the time of reflected pussy willows, spice bush and dogwood in spring, to the tulip tree gold and ranks of cattails in autumn, and even later when the banks are cushioned in snow, embroidered with patterns of stitches made by many little feet – of rabbits, birds, raccoons, squirrels – and the overhanging reflected branches sparkle with hoar frost or crackling ice.

Some of these changing moods of pond and river reflections are shown in the pictures. The memory reflections are evident in the written paragraphs, all of which have been taken from Fernwood Notes having a seasonal flavor.

May these Reflections of Fernwood carrry a message of personal thanks to you, the many generous people of

FERNWOOD'S

Board
Advisers
Staff
Teachers and Speakers
Volunteers
Members and
Friends

who have helped in innumerable ways to encourage and aid in the change from Fernwood, our family home, to Fernwood Incorporated, cultural center in three dimensions for people of the surrounding communities.

Each of you in a special way has helped in our search for the best program, patterns, and procedures for this new venture.

Thank you one and all,

Kay Boydston

Prologue

FINDERS — KEEPERS

We were the "finders" on October 12, 1938, the day we first drove down this old road. Altho both of us had grown up in the suburbs west of Chicago, four years of living at Thorn Acres had made us aware of many attractions of Michigan — the much larger number of native trees, shrubs and wild flowers, the many streams, ponds and lakes, and the easy-to-work sandy soil. When "the job" forced return to Illinois, we came back to Michigan whenever we could and drove up and down the river looking for a likely place for some imaginary future home. This October trip happened to be on my birthday, and after a St. Joseph business call and picnic lunch at Bear Cave, we decided as a sort of celebration to look up a realtor, travel on his gas this time and just pretend we were really in the market to buy. "Janeida", as these acres were then known, was the vacation home of the L. L. Bombergers of Hammond and was one of the places Mr. McOmber showed us that day. We loved the springs and streams and river, of course, but were not at once otherwise interested for it seemed closed in by comparison with the open views of a fifty acre marsh and wide bend of the river at Thorn Acres.

However, as time passed, we thought about Janeida more and more and for nearly three years, saw it at every opportunity as a fairyland in snow, in the heat of midsummer, at the time of autumn color and with its million blossoms in spring. On one such spring visit, we heard the liquid call of two wood thrushes in the woods as well as the wild sweet song of a water thrush as we crossed the bridge by the little falls. "This does it", we both said.

No longer able to resist our growing attachment for these hills and woods and water, first steps were taken toward a possible purchase.

* * * * *

On a never-to-be-forgotten Saturday — July 5, 1941, — after stopping in Hammond to give Mr. Bomberger a check for earnest money, we came here with Bob and Barbara (Don was in St. Paul visiting cousins and having mumps). Three things about that day stand out in memory besides the hard-to-believe realization that these woodsy acres soon would actually be ours. First, we found Miss Bomberger here with a number of house-party guests — some playing tennis, some on the porch and some with her down at the river. We did not know that she was unaware that her father was serious about selling and have always been sorry about the shock this must have been to her that day as Walter kidded her about "being on our property".

The second vivid memory of this day is of Bob. Busy at Purdue and with summer jobs, he had not been here before and as we walked down and up the hills he exclaimed over and over at each new pool and stream and bend in the path, "Gee, Mom, isn't it *neat*?" "Isn't it *neat*?" At that time, this was his most superlative adjective. Barbara loved especially the forget-me-nots in many damp spots.

The third memory of that day cannot even yet come to mind without a feeling of breath-catching and deep gratitude. For can you believe it on the road near the east end of the present rock garden we met again the same realtor, with three prospective buyers, cash in pocket, expecting to drive on to Hammond and close a deal that day which would turn Janeida into a Girl Scout Camp! After thirty-months of waiting, watching, hoping and planning, we had first possession by just one hour! Do you wonder that we felt we were truly meant to live here? Then, for nearly twenty-three very full, short years, we were the "keepers".

* * * * *

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Quite a lot is in this one — at first, it was more wishful thinking than fact, for there were very few ferns here when we came. Nevertheless, Walter suggested the name "Fernwood" because of my interest in ferns and because we thought ferns should be happy as well as appropriate here. Before the first Christmas cards were to go out, to make sure this name was acceptable to everyone, notes were sent to all members of both of our families and to a few close friends, enclosing penny postals to be marked and returned. Each listed "Fernwood" and three other possible names for our new home, indicated a place for further suggestions and a square in which each person should vote. By dint of a little searching, the returned postals are before me now, and they are indeed "penny postals" with the familiar green one cent stamp of so long ago!

When the twenty-three ballots were in and counted, "Fernwood" had polled eleven first choice votes, four second choice and one third. "Fernwood" was declared the winner and "Fernwood" it still is. Perhaps no other name would have held before us such a constant challenge and command to plant ferns and more ferns. Thru all the years of war jobs and rationed gas, teaching and every other distraction, we have managed each year to add ferns — at least some — and this goes on even at the present time.

* * * * *

IN RETROSPECT

In the fall of 1941, with the red tape of purchase completed, we thought our new home would be for vacations only. We did not know that December 7 would come to disrupt the plans of families everywhere. Before the winter was out it was clear that Walter's new business could not survive the war restrictions and was not one which could be converted to war production.

After weathering a cataclysm of renting the house, leaving the business, finding another job "for the duration" and moving

personal belongings of four to four different places (Bob in Purdue missed all this), Don and I suddenly found ourselves here in early April. Both of us thoroughly enjoyed this camping out period of primitive living, for he was so overjoyed to be out of school and I could not believe the happiness of a spring in the country. The others — many others — joined us each weekend.

Clothes were washed that summer on a board in the bath tub or in a galvanized tub on a bench outside. Water for either was hand pumped into buckets and heated on a slow old stove. Laundromats had not yet been even dreamed of. A gasoline refrigerator sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. The old 1930 Model A truck furnished any necessary transportation. Furniture already here was sufficient if not elegant. There was no telephone, no radio.

By a strange series of events, it was not long before Walter was transferred from Chicago to the South Bend office of the War Production Board. Now he could live here, too. Thus did the vacation home change to our permanent home and we have never left.

* * * * *

Twenty-three years of family living cannot be compressed into a few short paragraphs. There can be no quick resume of so many days. Some were filled with anxiety and hard work with war time jobs for two of us here while Bob flew his P51 over German targets. Some days held real discomfort those first cold winters when water spilled on the living room floor quickly turned to ice and when Don could often be seen doing his homework garbed in hat, coat, gloves and a blanket! There was inconvenience some days, too, when three or more hours had to be spent at the Buchanan drug store trying to get a five minute phone connection with Barbara at De Pauw. There were always some days with the difficulties and frustrations of battling snow troubles of our road, closed by drifts. An increasing number of days each year for eighteen of them, held the fun, friendship, worries and pressures of the Christmas greens (enough material

for a book in these). But most of the days were the happy ones of college years for three, weddings and the arrival of wonderful grandchildren.

I am sure all these grandchildren, an even dozen, now, will remember the family crowds of parents, cousins, uncles, aunts and friends who spent so many vacations and weekends here lying or playing games on the lawn, riding boats and barge on the river, singing to ukelele or putting on shows in the big old living room. They will remember, too, — tho perhaps less vividly than the grownups in the kitchen — what great quantities of food were consumed indoors, on the porch, on the lawns or by the river.

"It takes a heap of livin'
To make a house a home."
This one lives up to these true words
From the familiar po'm.

Remembering all the crowds it's held
Of family, friends and kin -
To sum it up, recount the fun,
We really can't begin.
The doors banged shut as kids galore
Came in with bats and skis
And turtles, worms, and polywogs
And fireflies and bees
And fishing poles and muddy shoes
And appetites like bears'
With happy voices loud and clear
And few if any cares.

There's still a heap of livin'
This Summer House can see —
We hope it stands a hundred years —
And then some more, maybe!

Looking back over this treasury of memories, we believe that Fernwood has meant much to many people — healthful work for us, fun for grandchildren, quiet retreat for city folks, sport for

boaters and water skiers, sustaining peace and courage for all of us in times of war and illness, inspiration for countless outdoor folks who love birds and trees, wild flowers and ferns. Fernwood was naturally endowed with hills steeper than usual in our country-side, with endless springs, pools, singing streams, and the river, and with an impressive number of native shrubs, trees, and wild flowers. We have tried always to do nothing to disturb or disrupt this natural beauty. Our aim was slowly (how frustratingly slowly at times!) to add to the wooded sections only things that would increase the number of eastern native plants and to take the separated areas near the houses and develop them with what seemed fitting and possible.

Gradually, too, we progressed inside to a better furnace, a telephone, a pump and heater for running water — hot as well as cold — what utter luxury! Slowly, pecky cypress replaced the despised celotex inside and roughcut tulip wood outside made the Summer House look a little less like a shack. The tiny box of a caretaker's house was made into a comfortable home enjoyed by my parents the last few years of their lives. It is now known as the Winter House.

* * * * *

But time marches on, no one can hold it back. Eventually and inevitably we found ourselves facing the fact that with "retired" income we would never be able to finish projects started nor to begin others only dreamed of.

We felt that we had two choices — to stay and watch Fernwood slide downhill as we grew older and capable of less and less work or to sell and leave it — perhaps to people who might have no knowledge or love of plants. Either choice seemed impossible to face. To make the situation even more discouraging, an appalling and growing number of dead and dying beloved old elms stood everywhere to mock us.

Then suddenly — another miracle!

* * * * *

AN IDEA
or
From FERNWOOD to FERNWOOD INCORPORATED

The conversations and events which resulted in this change were few indeed and so rapid as to seem like fiction rather than fact. Only two people were concerned in the first stages.

Because of Charles Mohr of Kalamazoo Nature Center the idea was born — the idea that Fernwood might become a preserve of some sort. It would be easier to leave, if we knew the plants and trees would be protected and enjoyed by others. He urged the promotion in any way possible of this idea of preserving Fernwood.

Because of Mrs. E. E. Barber, our good friend of many years, the idea took form and grew. When I mentioned our present dilemma, Charles Mohr's work at Kalamazoo and his strong endorsement of "the idea", she, too, was enthusiastic about it. Both must have thought a great deal about it, for when they met, a good many ideas were turned up in a very brief time — one of them was that if such a thing could ever be worked out, perhaps we Boydstons should stay on to continue the planting and projects already begun. Neither of us had thought of such a possibility as that.

After this, it was not long before Mrs. Barber had guided the whole idea to the exactly right people, Mary and Larry Plym. A very short visit with Mary, a few snapshots and the typed sheets about Fernwood sent to Larry, and almost immediately, Fernwood Incorporated was on its way.

The dead elms began to come down!

The Seasons

Day slips into night and
Night lightens into day.
By such subtle changes, scarcely noted,
Each season evolves from the last
And blends into the next.
Each is separate and unlike the others —
Yet, like a wheel turning forward, forward,
Each becomes a part of the whole.
Before each one has been fully savored,
Completely enjoyed or understood,
Before we are aware, a year has passed
And we are back again where we began
With one more chance to better comprehend
And fully enjoy each season as it passes,
To mark the high points of each day.
In each there is beauty to be found,
Truths to be learned, and
New memories to be built — for later
Reflection.

wm blackmun
74

Spring

A day came when the bloodroot was at its short-lived perfection. Each closed flower wrapped in its own leaf had pushed thru the ground, later to open the eight to twelve shiny white petals toward the sun. The spice bush cast a yellow haze thru the damp woods; hepatica flowers in whites, pinks and blues nestled among last year's leaves before the new silky ones appeared; anemones were everywhere — at first, pink, with dark reddish leaves; skunk cabbage still showed its strange brown flower and many another early flowering plant appeared on every hand.

A week later found the flowers of bloodroot gone, but its lovely leaves expanding to a surprising size to be a conspicuous part of the green forest all summer. By now, the long-lasting anemones were pure white and their leaves green; violets of many kinds grew in patches below redbuds now in full bloom everywhere in garden and woods. Jacks, trilliums, mertensia, and ginger were opening their flowers to the bees, and first ferns were uncurling in their typical watch-spring fashion. So much happening on every side!

Two weeks later, falling redbud blossoms were spreading pink rugs on the ground; dogwood was at its height, lilacs coming on and later wild flowers like phlox, geraniums and columbine were in bloom. Trees were nearly full and fern fronds far enough advanced to show their varying intricate designs. In little more than three weeks we had moved from the time of winter buds to full spring – all of it quite unbelievable — and thrilling, every moment.

DOUBLE-FLOWERED BLOODROOT

How can one plant by gnarled root
Bring thoughts of many things?
Of pleasant walks and lovely days
In many happy springs?

Of friends who've wandered down the path
To see these blossoms rare,
Of all our children's children
Who know it nestles there?

The spice bush leaning over it,
The greening forest floor,
The bubbling song of the ruby-crowned . .
All these and many more

"Rememberable" joys are brought to mind
E'en now as cold winds blow.
But we're as sure as ever we were
That Spring will follow snow!

MARCH, APRIL

Usually March and April are inseparable and at times indistinguishable from one another, so we'll consider the two months at one time.

We are quite as apt to have a sudden balmy spring day in March as to have a snowstorm in April. Both months are unsettled and unpredictable — March hasn't yet divorced itself from winter and April can't seem to settle consistently into spring — no humdrum monotony in either one and this makes them interesting and challenging. Almost never is there a morning without its weather surprise.

March is usually thought of as "windy" and April as "rainy", but even a very meager weather diary shows these characteristics can be all mixed up between the two. We can expect the most unexpected in weather changes.

After a few typical gusty winds which littered lawn and Rock Garden with leaves and broken twigs and blew oakleaf mulches into places where they were least wanted, it was this year only the fifth of March when the day came that stilled the wind, pushed the red of the thermometer way up and like magic clothed several banks in the Rock Garden with the bright chartreuse-yellow of winter aconite. Only two days before there had been just *one* in bloom. "Today there are hundreds and hundreds," says my notebook, "a sight for sore eyes" . . . I might have said "winter-weary eyes", but truthfully, I never tire of winter as most folks seem to do. But just let that thermometer begin to climb enuf to encourage the millions upon millions of spears, points, rosettes and clumps to stir thru the earth's crust, there is nothing under the sun which can hold me inside!

As March days are counted off — some windy, some very cold, some warm and quite balmy, these brave early blooms, closing and opening, shivering and beaming, show that they are "able to take it." Meantime, we are watching elsewhere each day for the appearance of other signs of spring. We watch the steadily stretching height of the rich green of the hundreds of daffodil leaves — glad when the cool days slow their growth, apprehensive when a warm spell speeds it up.

Walking or cart-riding here and there, we meet new surprises every day. One day when March is still the top page on the calendar we look up and suddenly at Fernwood and along the roadways every red maple is gay with its red flowers — the finest sight there will be with a blue sky background until the sycamores open dainty green leaves above their white trunks. A favorite sight of spring — redbud blossoms against white sycamore trunks and the shower of new leaves against the blue sky. It is not the deep blue of a mid-summer sky but rather, the typical blue of a lovely spring day.

A walk, no matter how brief, will turn up too many wonders to be able to realize half of them. Skunk cabbage, with its queer color, has been here since a very early day, if only to remind us that the Rock Garden isn't the only place to be. In the woods, the little Pepper-and-salt is one of the first to defy the snow and cold and very soon thereafter the pink, white and purple buds of hepaticas nodding their heads at the center of furry new leaf buds will open wide to attract the bees and remind us of the very day they were planted and of the friend who accompanied us to other woods where they were abundant so that plants with good color could be selected.

Very soon come those other redletter days, so few and so brief, when all the hundreds, nay thousands, of bloodroot blossoms, each with its many shiny petals, push up out of the leaf so protectingly wrapped around it as it comes out of the ground. From the screened porch to the bottom of the hill they have spread and increased to make a beautiful sight – one of Fernwood's finest of the year and one fast becoming rare in the

disappearing woodlands of these days. A day or two later, spreading patches of dogtooth violets are gay with their yellow "trout lilies". Above all these earliest wild flowers, the spice bush casts a misty yellow haze thru the woods and as we walk along, it is impossible to refrain from snapping off a small twig where it won't be missed, to revel in its spicy fragrance.

Sometimes slowly, sometimes so fast we cannot know how or when it happens, the yellow spice bush haze changes to a pink one of redbud branches turning from deepest red-purple to light lavender-pink through the woods. We would mourn the disappearance of the early delights if our attention were not turned to the new ones. Everywhere under redbud blossoms the carpet of anemones (now turned white instead of pink) remain and with them everywhere are violets. Some were here and hundreds of others planted - yellow ones, white ones, purple ones, pink ones — many sizes, many species. Just to note the innumerable leaf shapes is to wonder again at Nature's ingenuity. And the three patches of Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) started so long ago have loved the damp rich soil and all patches grow wider and wider each year. The fact that they disappear altogether a few weeks after bloom cannot keep us from enjoying their lush leaves and stems dripping sky-blue bells and topped by the pink buds.

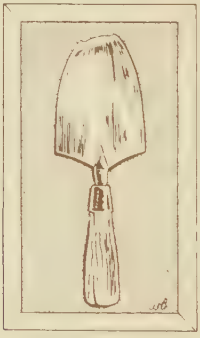
Sometime during April, the first peepers will be heard, then trilling toads and later on, thumping bullfrogs — all of them so much a part of spring. This first note from the pond or bog is as welcome as the first robin or bluebird song.

As the crescendo grows, we begrudge every sleeping moment and every moment which must be spent indoors, and we are glad that so much of the work necessary to keep Fernwood on track now lies out-of-doors. (It really does - we are not just rationalizing it so we can be outside!) Planting, transplanting, seeding and weeding as the ground warms up and the brown grass of winter turns green — dirty fingers and damp knees - the lovely fragance of rich woods soil — all this is as it should be in the magic months of April and March. After all, we are just being

conditioned for the even greater excitement of the much greater number of surprises and thrills which will follow in May. I'm sure we couldn't stand it if March and April burst in on us with all the glory of May. It would be too much.

The first phoebe's plaintive call, the sight of the first mourning dove, bluebird, robin and redwing — each so excitedly welcomed on its appointed arrival day — pave the way gradually for the hordes of warblers and bright songbirds which will greet us in May. That first shy bloom peeking from under a brown leaf or wedged into a tight crevice between rocks, brings not only its own special greeting but a promise of all the thousands to come in the gardens, fields, woods and bogs in just a little while.

Only a few of the highest of the highlights of April and March have been briefly touched upon. May the suggestion carried between the lines encourage you to open your doors and step out. Turn up your collar and wear gloves if you must. See whether **you** can grasp and appreciate all the things that are happening in every clod of dirt and in each square of turf — all the wonderful happenings which surround you in March and April. Even if you can't, you'll be getting yourself ready for May!



MAY

If asked my favorite month, I usually answer, "April 15 to May 15" as this allows for an "early spring" or a "late spring" and for the rising crescendo of spring miracles of opening buds and arriving birds which approaches or reaches its peak sometime during those thirty days.

But who are we to mix up the accepted calendar? And what right to change the page titled "May"?

Instead, let's consider May as it happens in the territory we know best — these acres of Fernwood.

Starting with the leftover miracles of April, we quickly move from skunk cabbage, hepatica and bloodroot under woodland spicebush to the later violet, trillium, and mertensia under redbuds; in the garden, we move from the hundreds of daffodils of April to primroses and tulips; and in the Rock Garden we nearly forget the early thrill of snow-edged patches of winter aconite and early cyclamen as we now watch for new bloom daily. After the first bird migrants have arrived on appointed March or April days, we know that by May a new song (or several) may be heard every day. From the first early sleepy bee and awakening fly, the air and ground and pools become alive with insects and "creepy crawlers".

So much to see! So much to remember from other springs! So much to enjoy on these lengthening but too-short days! As the number of miracles grows daily and the wonder within

us climbs to higher and higher pitch, it all seems something like that beautiful and dramatic ocean swell in "Hawaii 5-0", which gradually reaches its ultimate and breaks into the huge perfect wave with a roar, a splash and a cloud of foam and spray.

Quite early in the month or beginning in April, a haze or a mist of soft green steals thru the woods and garden edges, as the first of millions of tiny leaves emerge from their buds. Then one day long before we are ready for it, a purplish maroon color is noted here and there and we are sure the redbuds are awakening to their spring show. Gradually the deep color lightens - rapidly if it is warm, and slowly if it is cold - but we know that about one week or ten days after the first dark color is noted, they will reach their pinkish-purplish color of best bloom. Just before this time, chartreuse or deep cream blossoms show here and there and we know that before the redbuds have laid their pink carpets there will be the white of flowering dogwoods.

Always when it is redbud time at Fernwood there are many violets - some must be watched and kept out of certain places but they are worth that trouble for the great variety of their species and for the few places they can be left to wander at will and make a pool of blue. Some of the native violets, (*V. canadensis, striata* and *rostrata*) are welcome anywhere and it is a pleasure to see a small patch of them where one or two had been planted many years ago. As the month moves on, the many species of trillium begin to bloom just a bit later than the stretches of mertensia which looked so sky-blue and beautiful under the redbuds. Many interesting species have been added to the native white *T. grandiflorum* so a trillium walk can now be an interesting study of these lovely flowers with white, yellow or red flowers — sometimes erect, sometimes nodding, always interesting.

About this same time the many Asiatic wild crabs clothe their branches almost solidly with blossoms from white thru all shades of pink. And the real apples — perhaps by many the

most beloved of all — add their pink-shaded fragrant blossoms to the total wealth of bloom on every side. Lilacs are showing color, too, and in a week or less, the old lilac garden will perfume the air over all of Fernwood. And speaking of fragrances, some of the viburnums are now commanding attention of people and bees with their delicious strong perfume.

Every day now, too, we can expect a new bird arrival. The accomplished brown thrasher sings his early morning medley from the topmost branch of the tallest tree — an expected part of all this magic of beauty that is mid-May. A flurry of black and brown on the ground shows a handsome pair of towhees rustling the dried leaves. Some day very soon — perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow — there will be indigo buntings and American redstarts, Then, soon, will come that day when the first sight of the bright orange and black of the oriole is seen. His clear-as-a-bell song fills the air as he flies joyously from tree to tree. Perhaps in a quieter place, less open than the garden areas, if we're lucky, we'll see that other gorgeously-colored black and scarlet-red tanager. That will surely be a red-letter day as well as a redbird day. But the one that tops them all, the one most waited for and yet always a surprise when it does come — that mild May morning with the world at its most beautiful — we welcome the liquid song of the wood thrush! We know that for several weeks or into the dead of summer he will call to another thrush in the early morning and in every green twilight — the embodiment of peace and tranquility. It is too good to be true.

And, of course, by mid-May, the peak of the great waves of migrating warblers will be reached. This, one of the least understood miracles of the natural world, leaves one speechless with wonder, when suddenly some May morning trees come alive with hundreds of bright-colored bird jewels busily flitting about, constantly on the move to find insect food and just as constantly singing their songs — some a mere twittering, some melodious but all hard to learn and remember from year to year. Whenever this warbler time comes along, every other

activity should be cancelled immediately. They will be here such a very short time — and they need studying and enjoying, but there is a certain frustration felt also — one wishes they had come a little sooner, before the leaves were so large or that they would frequent other than the tallest trees.

Sometimes about or just after mid-May, fiddle heads of all sorts and sizes will show up thickly in many places — some tall and straight and rather stiff, some soft and fragile-looking, some sturdy and clothed with brown chaff or white wool. The great variety of the fronds they will produce hold our best promise for summer. If it were not for these, how could one bear to see the last of the spring wild flowers — phlox, wild geranium and columbine — come into bloom to mark the end of another spring? Of course, we know there will be wild roses and shrub roses; azaleas and rhododendrons; herbs and many perennials; iris, hermerocallis and peonies; annuals and fall colored foliage. All this plus the summer's toads, frogs and fireflies; bees, wasps and spiders. No season is dull or empty. But it seems now in late May that all of these summer things together could not replace the great joy and wonder of one May day with its misty woods and borders of many shades of green, its rush of bloom, its strong perfume, its bird song (best of the year), its first crop of unwanted dandelions, its high time in the Rock Garden, its special time for bird watchers as well as garden and nature-lovers.

* * * * *

ESPECIALLY THESE

Spring! What a magical time! Color and bulging life everywhere!

At first, just a break in the long winter — a feeling of anticipation, nothing more. Snow melts, skies turn from gray to blue — a soft breeze has a little balm in it, but the air is still chilly. The first early exploration into the woods yields nothing. Hepaticas are not showing, nor even the dear little Pepper-and-salt – but somehow you return to the warm house with that very sure knowledge that things are "about to happen". You must speed up those indoor chores you've begun if you are to be free to be out and on the spot when the growing things, pulsating with new life, come in ever more rapid succession. You wish you could be twenty people so as to be in as many places at one time. One pair of eyes, one pair of walking legs cannot keep up with this spring explosion of beauty and surprises. No day is half long enough, appreciation half big enough to take in all of it.

In the succession of arrivals, there is a remarkable regularity of schedule from year to year, give or take a few days, and you know that when the earliest aconite, cyclamen and snowdrops are just past their prime in the rock garden, the woods path yields first discoveries; redwings are swaying on last year's cattails; a robin announces he's back from his winter trip and bluebirds should be looking for nesting sights, if bluebird times were as they used to be before man's discovery and use of modern pesticides.

As the brown leaf-carpeted woods floor is gradually pricked with green; as the bare branches of undergrowth become bathed in a haze of pastel pinks and beiges and very light greens with the millions of leaf buds lending their bits of color; as birds come back in ever-growing number — tho each new day in the woods brings mounting joy and excitement, still there are highlights in this time of many miracles.

All birds arriving in this time of their brightest plumage and happiest song and all opening wild flowers are enjoyed and welcome, but *especially these:*

The skunk cabbage is like no other. When the sharp brown point pushes thru the cold, still crusty ground, it brings a delight more acute than many a later more beautiful plant. The luscious-brown spathe, marked yellowish green, is an arranger's dream. If you dig one to put it in a brown bowl, you know immediately where it gets the name. If instead, you had disturbed a white-striped black "kitty", you'd have been engulfed in the same odor, tho a bit more of it. Later on, the big leaves suggest the second part of the name. So this is one of the specials just because of its queerness, rich color, and very early announcement of spring.

Almost right away, hepatica blooms will be showing and we search out those special ones of clear deep pink or extra deep blue which we associate with certain excursions into other woods with congenial friends. We look always for such special ones brought in many years ago by two who were to be married and two others who recently had been — and they remind us of many things. As spice bush opens, feathery yellow, over these and myriad patches of shiny white bloodroot, we know that any moment now the little ruby-crowned kinglet will add his joy to ours as his song bubbles through the air. We know, too, that in a very few days, another "extra special" will be pushing above its enveloping leaf — the double bloodroot. This is the only example I can think of at the moment, of a single blossom enhanced by doubling and redoubling of its petals. Usually, a single flower, if meant to be single, has more charm and natural

beauty by far. But just to look at a small patch of double bloodroot is to stand transfixed. Shiny and very white, it somehow seems so beautifully complete. This particular slowly spreading patch always brings thought of the very dear friend who gave the first little piece of it with just one blossom the first year. How I wish she could see it now with thirty or more flowers.

The green dragon is a close relative of the familiar Jack-in-the-pulpit but they do not, in the green stage, bear much family resemblance. When in seed, they could be identical twins.

"Jack" sits in his cozy "pulpit" (the spathe) under one or two three-parted leaves. The green dragon's single leaf, on the other hand, has from five to fifteen segments and its spadix looks like a slender greenish long-pointed horn protruding for several inches from the spathe. Described as "common in moist woods", it had nevertheless escaped me in wanderings of many years and became an object of special search.

The white dog-tooth violets are always especially welcome. Having been so long familiar with large patches of them in Illinois it was a surprise to move to Michigan and find only yellow ones. It is a disconcerting habit of these lovely spring earlies to send up spreading patches of leaves but only when the root is old enough and deep enough are there flowers. Here old established patches have more than the usual proportion of blossoms. Altho their mottled leaves and bright yellow flowers are eagerly awaited in early spring, the white ones are very special — both for their graceful snowy beauty and for their many associations of years ago.

By the time these have faded, many kinds of trilliums take the spot light, all lovely in their triplicate design. Again, among the reds and the whites, the erect and the nodding, there are special favorites. The yellow is one. These flowers, the color of lemon cream pie, are set in the foil of a light green mottled leaf and never fail to startle many who know trilliums only as white or brown-red.

We shall be looking this spring for some "green trilliums" planted last year. These are queer, no two alike. Some say

they are ill — a virus — and if so, we are sorry and to be on the safe side, planted them quite far from other trillium areas. Regardless of what causes the green markings on white flowers, we think they are quite beautiful. The double trillium, unlike the double bloodroot, is more rare than beautiful.

When the many kinds of wood violets carpet the woods, a few are at the top of the ladder of affections — for instance, the little early white one for its sweet fragrance, the long-spurred violet for its unusual form and cute face, the birdfoot violet for its different leaf and large blossom of clear lovely color.

When the ferns begin to unroll everywhere, it is always an especial joy to see the healthy strong growth of the hartstongue and the grace and beauty of the maidenhair. Of all the woodland trees, the American beech is without question our favorite with the dogwood a close second.

Almost surfeited in the host of sights and sounds of spring, perhaps it is only normal that some strike an especially responsive chord. We have mentioned only a few plants, most of them

to be found here in the watery places near the Summer House porch - and only a few birds, to be seen most anywhere on a lucky day. There are so many many more deserving mention.

* * * * *

In the spring when the first blue wings streak across the sky, when the black birds with their red epaulets swing on the old cattails as they sing (for our family, at least) "Bar-bar-eeee-a", when the first fairy music of the tiny ruby-crowned kinglet is heard and the wild sweet call of the water thrush echoes again above the little waterfall here, each arrival brings deep joy that another spring is at hand. But all of these seem only a prelude to the climax when the first wood thrush sings from the pale green of budding trees, giving assurance that he will nest nearby to gladden our evenings and mornings with his liquid, tranquil song until the woods grow hot in summer, and still and deep dark green.

* * * * *

Velvety moss, smoothed over a rough stone, a violet tucked below, white clouds in a bright sky (or gentle rain from a gray, one, it matters not) — these are the things that spring is made of and they awaken dear memories for old and young alike.

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Summer

THE "SEAT BRIDGE" AT CORKSCREW FALLS

The earliest glimpses of the Rock Garden with the many astonishing blooms everywhere, the rambles along still winter-locked woods paths, the first probing of leaf-covered herb beds or flower borders have all been but preludes to that first unexpected balmy day of March, calm and warm enough to sit a few moments on the "seat bridge" on the way to the river or cabins below.

Everyone seems to enjoy this spot but not everyone sees the surroundings as we do. Memories attached to this bridge began to be built as soon as we came here — or really, before.

In the three years between our first sight of these few acres of water and woods and our purchase of them, we came as often as possible "to look around" and each time sat to dream awhile on this bridge, already a favorite place. On one such exploration in spring, we were transported to places even more remote as we watched a Louisiana water thrush stepping across the stones of the stream and heard his wild, sweet song carried clear as a bell above the sound of the tumbling water. To live where such a wildness might be a part of each day — it seemed too much to fully grasp.

On another day a little later in another year, as we again sat here trying to absorb the myriad sights and sounds of spring, we heard a wood thrush, very near, calling to and being answered by another near the house. Not one wood thrush had ever been heard at Thorn Acres, our home for four years, and here we were not only sure of one but of at least two — promising their singularly characteristic kind of utter peace and tran-

quility for many early mornings and twilight hours of summers here. I have always felt that these two thrushes heard from this bridge figured importantly in our decision to make the move as soon as we could manage it.

The bridge was here when we came — or rather its predecessor was here. Not as nice as this one, that first one looked very insecure, for unlovely 2x4 boards painted green (!) supported the benches and floor from the level of the rock strewn stream bed. Very soon, this bridge came down and was replaced by one with similar benches and railings but supported on two tree trunks of adequate size and length laid from one bank to the other. In time, the ends resting on the soil rotted away and similar logs had to be set in. The next bridge was supported on steel I-beams (not easy to find in war time) which would not rot nor be attacked by termites. Even after this one was built, there was a nice swing to the bridge — but it felt safer. Sitting on the west bench, there is a good view of the little falls twisting over some natural tufa. It was named Corkscrew Falls by the former owner and has always been so called by all of us.

When each of these bridges was built it promised to be an elegant place for reading a book. Time for this has not yet materialized for me, but many letters have been written here to children away at college or on the Colorado ranch and probably hundreds of lunches have been eaten here. A little grandchild asking questions about birds, a sandwich apiece (watercress, if possible), a cookie and a coke or glass of milk — these times stored up many memories which can never be taken away even when college and homes of their own now claim those little boys and girls of long ago.

In those first years, a trout family lived in the deepened pool of water just below the little falls. We could hardly believe it ourselves until one day a guest climbed down to the stream and put his whole arm up to his shoulder into the well hidden rocky hole under the splash of the water. Usually, with patience, we could discover them or at least one of them — darting about.

And just once in all that time we walked over the bridge at the right moment to see one jump over the falls to the stream above. What excitement!

Another time, as 4-year-old Johnny walked across this bridge with me, he looked down at all the bubbles and said, "Look, Kay, that stream has *soap* in it."

Nearby and easily seen from the bridge there is a stump which to others must be just a stump. To me, it is the place which reminds me of the first fern I ever planted at Fernwood — a maidenhair brought in a cracker box from our church camp near Bridgman. The fern or its descendant still grows here, and this is a happy memory; but the stump also recalls sad days for this tree was the very first at Fernwood to succumb to Dutch Elm disease and have to be cut down — the first of about a hundred large trees and a growing nightmare for several years.

Near the East bench and at the top of the bank there is a hemlock now seven feet tall — which came as a tiny seedling in a single piece of kleenex from the same camp. Both this and the maidenhair were eased into the ground here before we really owned Fernwood, but at a time when we were contemplating the purchase and could hardly wait! Near the west bench, the big sycamore with gangling roots bared to the air looked as precarious in those early days as it does today. Compensating roots in the ground opposite them must be strong to hold it so safe and steady. It would be a sad day indeed if it should ever smash down on the bridge and railings.

Another memory as I sit here seems more like a made-up tall tale (even to me) as I write it, but it is the gospel truth! One day, I walked down the steps from the lawn to the pumphouse and was startled to see a great blue heron standing there in the stream. As quietly and slowly as possible, I walked down the path to the bridge. Just as quietly and slowly he kept pace with me as he high-stepped along in the stream. Not until I had reached the bridge and settled myself on the bench did he lift his big wings and take off. Oh, for someone with a camera to have been nearby!

Of course, being the first and only such resting place for those first years, it was the one we always used — the first place to think of when a letter came from a P-51 flyer in the war — or from a college with special news — the first place when sickness or sudden improvement in an illness sent us here for needed strength or unexpected gratitude. Cool sounding water on a hot day, spring's bursting buds all around after a long winter, leaves of scarlet and yellow and brown lazily floating down on a bright autumn day - to mark all such speical times this bridge was our first thought. And when the moon was fingernail-sized and even more when it was full, what a place for lovers or old married folks!

Again, because it was here first, it was natural to begin our fern planting of so many years right here nearby, gradually expanding and widening the area planted. I can sit here today, look at a certain maidenhair, Christmas or marginal fern and remember vividly the happenings of the day it was planted. The records show that 1,431 ferns have been planted near the area of this seat bridge. Every time we sit here, even momentarily, we thank ourselves for planting them to add their natural grace and beauty to an already beautiful spot. Do you wonder that this seat bridge is for us a place to remember many things as well as a place to rest? Perhaps the time is coming when more time can be spent here "sitting and thinking" — or maybe, "just sitting" — perhaps even for looking into that book!

* * * * *

When "the world is too much with us"
Or with worry or fears we're forlorn
We often come to this quiet spot
Where courage and hope are reborn.

In the beauty of a moonlit night,
At noon in the welcome shade,
In a gentle rain or at dawn or dusk —
A few moments here — we're remade.

The plants and trees may be autumn-hued
Or soft in summer's green
Or perhaps just aroused by miraculous spring
Or covered with snow and unseen.

For us, this bridge and the singing stream
Have meant pleasure and peace untold
So now is it strange we are grateful indeed
To know, as the years unfold,

That many another kindred soul
Will find peace from a small bird's call?
May the ferns and moss and stones for him, too,
Point to God who arranged it all!

JUNE

There's no doubt that many things which come to mind when we think of June belong to this month and no other.

Brides and roses, new ferns, green and lush — blackberry blossoms, and first mosquitoes — all these things are June's, and many more.

Just when we think we can't possibly bear to see May disappear not to return for another year — with its myriad blossoms of crabapple, dogwood, and lilacs and its daffodils, tulips and primroses, we suddenly see the first rosebud or a luscious strawberry and we remember that June will come along with blossoms of its own. It can't ever take the place of May, top favorite of the dozen months, but it can assuage that "all gone" feeling which always comes with the end of spring.

So - we'll try to forget May and "think positive" about this new month and with another walk and a golf cart ride around, we'll see what there is to be glad about on a fresh June morning.

There's no doubt about it — in the past few days, spring has given way to summer. Most of the tree leaves are full

size now and ready to start their important work. In the garden, first buds turn into full blown roses with their doubled and redoubled number of petals and along country hedgerows and roadside ditches we see the single wild roses of such beautiful simplicity — five perfect pink petals around a pincushion of yellow stamens. There are several kinds of these American wild roses to be seen on a ride thru the country (or a walk along the east side of our parking lot) each one with its characteristic leaves, thorns, and stem color to set off the lovely blossoms.

And that first plump red strawberry — what a fore-taste that is of many more — for cream and sugar or for shortcakes before the month is over. Before we came to Michigan, strawberry shortcake was to us a dessert — with the biscuit type preferred over sponge cake. It was a surprise to us to find that often in strawberry time some Michigan folks were wont to make a plate-size shortcake loaded with berries and swimming in scarlet juice — a whole meal. We could never adopt these ways and for us strawberries are still for dessert — not a substitute for meat and potatoes.

The little wild ones are harder to find in tall grass and more tedious to pick but oh, so sweet. Strawberries, both wild and tame, are a very high point scored for June.

In the perennial garden, the border has changed to the pink of the low Geranium *lanastriense* plants which we hardly noticed were there last month when yellow primroses bordered the beds. And tall spires of foxgloves always surprise us in June for we forget they are here. Canterbury bells, the other tall biennial, would be blooming here now, too, if we had them. Another campanula (*C. persicifolia*) in blue and white helps out the June picture, and tall thalictrums bloom as do garden heliotrope, Siberian iris and veronicas.

In the sunnier beds of the Main Garden north of the terrace, each early June day sees the opening of more iris, rainbow hued. Blues, from milky white to wedgewood and lush purples; sunshine colors from creamy yellow to deep gold and one almost

orange; and browns from beige to dark spice and mahogany shades. Every morning the wilted flowers of yesterday must be picked off but this can be a pleasant task with the opportunity it affords to marvel at the colors and irridescence of the day's buds opening as the regal "poor man's orchid." The fragrance of most of them is like no other. One especially, a light blue, brings to memory a day when my sweet grandmother took me, a little girl, to see her neighbor's "flags". Her joy in the color and fragrance was imparted to me, never to leave, tho surely the flowers of those long ago days were quite small and insignificant, compared to their present descendants.

With the iris and about the same time, peonies are opening — new colors, taller plants, larger flowers on stiffer stems, singles and doubles and other marvels of the hybridizer's skill. So often taken for granted, this is a blessing we should note and be grateful for — the hours and generations of plants which have gone into making the flowers we can now have in our gardens. Tree peonies top the June peony show for us, especially the yellow ones which never seem real.

Delphiniums begin to open in June in many shades of clearest blue and tall lupines attest to Mr. Russell's skill. Another flower belonging especially to June and one we forget about but are so glad to see each year is the early daisy — so shiny white, so welcome with the colors of other flowers in garden or bouquets. They bridge the need for daisies until the larger shastas come in July.

In June, the last of the annuals are finally planted but like the new vegetables in garden rows, they are too small for anything but future promise. Young tomato plants have first yellow flowers but no fruit yet. Radishes (and young lettuce) are ready to pick if they were planted when they should have been, but mostly, in these vegetable plantings, June is just a young month preparing for later summer.

In the woods and along the trails it is quite different and more mature. Our early joys have vanished — bloodroot,

hepaticas, marsh marigolds, anemones, violets and trilliums — and the woods trails might be nostalgic places in June were it not for the ferns now full grown but still so fresh and green. Sticky bedstraw clambers over all favorite earlier plants and we wish for time to rescue them. In watery places, we come suddenly upon sky blue patches of the marsh forget-me-not.

The birds of forest and garden are busy with their first broods. Most of the warblers have come and gone, but fat robins with their juvenile spots are following proud parents about the lawns. Baby cardinals have left the nest (this year in the garage's tangled vine). An oriole, flashing color above us and dropping the characteristic strong notes of his song, seems a needed part of a lovely June morning. And the wood thrush still lifts our spirits with the liquid trilled notes in the evening or earliest morning half light. Humming birds dart backwards and forwards balancing in mid-air to sup nectar from suitable flowers. Butterflies are everywhere, swallowtails and others which choose June as their time to live.

Away from the woods and the gardens, up there in the meadow — meadowlarks and bobolinks still sing their sweet songs as they rise from and return to certain spots where their homes must be. The grass is getting tall — we never like to have the meadow mowed until we know the babies are safe. Occasionally a handsome pheasant walks by and from tracks and antler marks on some of the trees, we know that deer are here sometimes when we are not.

Tho we have scarcely noted a few of the treasures of June, these may be enough to prove that in forest, meadow, lawn and garden, time moves on from spring to summer with a pause in June for the things that are June's. The fresh, dewy green of morning and the long light of evening with perhaps a hot day or a fine rain between — these are June's blessings as we mark the longest daylight of the year. As we pick off spent lilac blooms, pull weeds and fight deerflies, we shall note and enjoy them, for they'll not be back again just like this, until another June, twelve months away.

JULY

What is there in the fields and woods and gardens that makes July special and different from its neighbors, June and August? We'll take another walk, a ride in the cart and one in the car, to find out.

Stifling heat, corn growing so fast you can't believe the change from day to day (and can't wait for the first ears to be on the table); cherries ripening for picking and for pies; raspberries both wild and tame, replacing the strawberries of June; sudden thunder storms bringing rain and fresh crops of mosquitoes, or long periods of drouth with leaves scorching and curling and our spirits drooping with them; great blue herons standing like motionless statues in quiet lagoons; bullfrogs thumping in the ponds; and fireflies turning the evenings into fairy worlds — all this is July.

In the garden, yarrow and veronicas and tall hollyhocks say it is July. Hollyhocks used to be such an expected sight beside a barn, along a fence, by every abandoned farmhouse, or as a background for other plants in well kept gardens. One wonders why the old single-flowered kinds are so hard to find — either plants or seeds - in all the many colors there used to be. Zinnias and marigolds have not yet come into their own, tho petunias are blooming well. All the iris and peonies and delphiniums are gone and most of the bloom of flowering shrubs. We'd be hard put indeed for any boquets, were it not for hemerocallis, for the July blooms and decorative foliages in the herb garden and for what we find along the roadsides. Hemerocallis saves the day for July with the one-a-day flowers of lightest creamy yellow thru all the shades of oranges and reds. No whites yet among the new hybrids, but there are some pinks and apricots. We are fortunate to have these showy easy flowers to brighten up the otherwise rather empty borders in July.

Shrub roses should bloom the whole month but all the native species which gave such a good show in June are now busy making their hips for fall coloring. Only two wild roses save

their blooms for July — one, probably loveliest of all, the prairie rose (*R. setigera*) which here fills in the back corner behind all the others, and scrambles over any handy shrub or low tree. The blossoms are typical of wild roses — fragrant, single, and clear pink. The swamp rose, too, brightens damp places now (here there are some by the lowest pond on the way to the river) and riders on barges and boats will see them tucked here and there along the river bank, reflecting beauty in the water.

Now, on the way to the river, the brown-eyed Susans light up the pathway with their rich gold.

If July skies have been normally kind with rains, the woods will have lush patches of ferns — and paths will wander thru thick jewel weed and rapidly growing plants of the later-blooming fall flowers.

Along the roadsides as the last day of June slips from the calendar, we suddenly note that we are riding between thick rows of chicory — with flowers of a heavenly blue color, and with them the first Queen Ann's Lace. Now we know we'll be seeing this everywhere until late fall and we may even grow tired of its ever-smaller flowers and its dried blossoms looking like dirty up-turned baskets, but now with its first very large flower heads it is a welcome sight. Viewed thru a hand lens it is one of Nature's loveliest and most intricate designs, another of those blossoms with every one a whole galaxy of flowerets, each minute and perfect. No pattern of finest lace could surpass it in design.

Along the roadsides we see now patches of the wild day lily and tall sweet clover both yellow and white. Look at these, too, with a hand lens and marvel at the tiny blossoms each shaped like a miniature sweet pea. Best of all the wild flowers along Michigan roads, is butterfly weed (*Asclepeas tuberosa*) in its lovely madder shades. It is a flower arranger's dream and we use it all month in mixed boquets with white and blue and all shades of yellow and orange. It is perfect with hemerocallis and later with zinnias and marigolds. This plant alone

makes July worth waiting for — this and the early transparents ripening to make the best applesauce and pies of all the year's apples.

Every month there is something of interest in the bird world and July is no exception. The chorus of bird song morning and evening is not quite so loud and joyous as it was in May, tho the cardinals, robins and wood thrushes still greet the early light. But each time we hear the thrush's liquid song, we wonder how many more times we can expect it. Time moves on toward that dead-quiet time of moulting when the birds are resting and building strength toward the fall migration as well as growing a new coat of feathers.

Many calls and songs we hear in July *sound* like hot summer — the bob white and the bob-o-link in the prairies and meadows, thick with clover and fleabane and grasses; the whipoorwill calling over and over thru the night; the wood pewee plaintively repeating his name, seeming to belong to hot quiet woods.

Tho every month has its insects, in July the hordes seem to reach their peak. By this time, one isn't likely to push a hand down into a fuzzy nest of baby rabbits when clearing out leaves from under bushes or plants. Instead, the half grown young ones are scurrying here and there into shrubbery or woods. In July, early morning is the best time to be out, as the rabbits well know. This morning, before the sun was up over the treetops, as I opened the door, there were four young and one mother rabbit on one lawn and three on another. At the sound of the door they all bounded to green safety. Across the bridge two more to the right and three in the big garden to the left flashed their white tails. Cute they are, but I shuddered to think of all the things they were about to eat. At least, now at Fernwood, there are no long rows of beans as there used to be — to be cut to the ground in one night or early morning.

Yes, the gardens, fields, woods, and roadsides of July with their plants and all their little creatures are July's own.

AUGUST

At the outset we'll admit that there can be exceptions to everything we'll say about August — it can sometimes be delightfully cool. Sometimes June is more like August than August itself. It can sometimes be green after adequate rain, but *usually*, August means heat and more heat, fields browning or goldening toward harvest; farmers wishing for rain or farmers not wanting rain while mowing. August is the height of vacation time with a feeling of the need to enjoy every free day before Labor Day will again ring the school bells. August is the time for delicious corn on the cob, dripping with butter, and for ripe tomatoes from the garden — tomatoes firm and red and full of taste whether icy cold or fresh picked from a loaded vine. No more berries now and cherries have been picked, but plums are coming on and peaches and cantaloupe. Queen Anne's lace is still thick along the roadside and ragweed chases the hay fever sufferer indoors or farther north; ferns are restfully green in the woods; zinnias and marigolds brighten the garden now; cicadas sound hot at noon and katydids strum the air at night. So many things are August's own, it is another good month.

From memories built over many, many summers on a dry land Colorado ranch, August still seems to mean the endless cutting of native hay — acres and acres of it — day after day after day. In the early years, mowers and rakes were drawn by teams of horses as many as could be found. Round and round a field they

went until the endless rows left by the mower had been raked into mounds over the field. Then the big hayrack, horse drawn, moved slowly from one to the next, one man or boy driving, two pitching the piles ever higher onto the load, one man on top arranging and moving it about to keep the load even and flat.

August means all these men coming in, tired, hot and healthy to eat a huge noon dinner, talk about the crop, the sky, the weather, then to fill their water jugs for afternoon hours of more of the same. August then was totally filled with "getting the hay in." Hired hands, all the family and vacationing friends were pressed into service either in the fields or the kitchen. But when the hay racks were loaded high — and Oh, so fragrant — then all who wished to, little and big, could ride the load to the barn or pasture, (sometimes a long ride indeed) where it was unloaded — again by hand and pitchfork — to become part of a growing, huge stack, insurance against winter wind and cattle hunger.

Out there, wispy tall columns of little whirlwinds moving here and there across the plains are an expected sight on a hot August day, and driving along it seems incredible that the shimmering mirages of water should all turn to dry gravel when they are reached. Occasionally, a corner of land is fenced off and the spine-tingling sign "quicksand" is hung on the barbed wire. One such spot if passed at night always induced nightmares.

But dreams of another kind, never-ending then or since, were those which haunted me whenever the snow-capped mountains became visible on any clear day. Though sixty-five miles away, it seemed we could walk to them before breakfast. We knew that before the summer was over there would be at least one trip to them — one day or two which would have to satisfy for another year a mountain hunger seemingly born in me. We approached them as they loomed ever nearer with mounting excitement and finally we came to the splashing stream tumbling over rocks, then the steep hillsides covered with evergreens

and aspens. Higher and higher, around hairpin turns, past little mountain lakes and snow-capped peaks until we reached our final destination and ultimate pleasure, the alpine meadows looking rocky from the car but actually covered with tiny, bright gems and treasures.

Back on the plains, August meant also spectacular sunsets, each one better and more awesome than the last; the welcome, cool breeze which always came after the sun had disappeared and then the marvelous night sky more full of close, bright stars, glowing planets and shooting stars than any eastern sky ever could be. Often, several isolated lightning storms could be seen at one time around the great horizon, with a starry sky above and between them. Out there, the whole world seems to be sky. In the daytime, fast moving clouds cast ever-changing blue shadows over the plains and distant chalk buttes rise from them. By day and by night this western sky makes one feel the wonder and majesty and enigma of the universe.

August here at Fernwood and in the eastern country where only bits and pieces of sky can be seen through tall trees, can also mean sudden summer storms and browning grass. Here, it means endless watering and cutting and weeding toward fall and another spring. Katydids are here instead of western grasshoppers; moles instead of prairie dogs; cottontails instead of jack rabbits; tiny ants in the kitchen instead of big, red flying ants stupidly making enlarging circles on the floor which can be swept into a dustpan; vacation days by the lake instead of in the hayfield; humidity instead of dry burning heat; little mosquitoes instead of big ones.

Yes, everywhere, August means vacations and heat, the hum of insects and fresh vegetables and fruit in abundance. Because it is vacation time, August is the best possible time for building memories. May they never include dullness or boredom — there is so much to see, to do, to learn in any part of this great, broad land.

Early on a summer morning, when fresh green fronds are heavy with rain drops or sparkling with dew and even more on a misty evening at dusk, when the ferns' outlines are dimmed by vapor rising from river and marsh and tiny lights of fireflies are darting all about, I often think our fern-planted areas must be more "Limberlosty" than the Limberlost itself. It is the ferns and only the ferns which create this effect, this impression of unreality, this feeling that heaven itself is not too far away and must be full of ferns.

wm Blackmun
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Autumn

SEPTEMBER

September means children with their books, skipping off to school – or more likely, boarding a bus; college freshmen at orientation programs; the army of teachers back from vacation and on the job again in kindergartens, grade schools, high schools and colleges across the land; housewives in the kitchen canning peaches, making pickles and grape juice; perhaps a few in the country still stirring catsup and apple butter and chili sauce. It is really too bad that so many are now willing to forego these fragrant tasks in favor of store products in tin cans and frozen packages. We are too busy, we say. Too busy at what? Can any pleasure for which this time is spent compare with the satisfaction of seeing rows of jars on the shelf — red with tomatoes, purple with grape juice, cream color with canned pears and peaches? And even more often missed by most people these days is the fun of picking the fruit and harvesting the vegetables. Is anything in nature more beautiful and colorful than a bunch of Concord grapes? Anything more miraculous than its heavy ripening on the vine?

And what of the world outside the kitchen and schoolroom? What's doing in the woods and in the garden? The way to find out about September is to take a walk in it — and the morning chosen for this is a perfect one the clear sky and scurrying big white clouds are more like October's and give promise of more fine days to come even crisper than this one. So far, there is only an occasional leaf which floats down with any yellow or red in it, or a single small branch on maple or dogwood along the river showing color. We can hardly remember what it was or will be when every tree flaunts its brilliant raiment, but we feel a certain anticipation of that time expected quite soon.

Right now the world around us is still green, the trees are heavy with green leaves looking like summer which is just disappearing around the corner of the year. September can hold some very hot days, too, and often the first days of school are hotter than any of July and August. Memories of insufferably hot days and restless hot children are part of every teacher's experience and probably one reason that Labor Day is so dreaded if it is an early date in the month!

In the quiet woods today there are jays screaming back and forth but no other sounds of birds. Before September ends, however, there will be hordes of them passing through and the alert trail walker will see them flitting actively but quietly among the tall trees or hear a soft song reminiscent of the gay spring love song but so much quieter, like a hushed echo. Each year the white throat's song seems especially so – plaintive yet content, a lovely sound to wait for.

September days seem so suddenly shorter. We know this change started in late June, but it has not been noticeable until just now. At night, the sounds of katydids, crickets and other woods insects are loud and constant but taper off toward morning as we know they will throughout this month toward that day when they are silenced, their part of the life cycle complete.

After the dry spell there are no mushrooms or fungi to speak of. This year these colorful bits of nature expected usually about now were plentiful in July instead, when there was much rain. But one good rain of last week freshened the ferns and the ginger and other carpeting plants of the woods which had been dry and curled, so today they look again as they did in summer. Do they know, I wonder, how soon they will be gone above ground? And do the evergreen ferns like marginal, Christmas and polypody have any idea how charming and valuable they will seem when all the others are snow covered? If they don't know, we do! The hand lens carried in my pocket show the marvelous design and pattern of the sori on the backs of the various kinds of fertile fronds.

This is the time for the hand lens. It shows so many

miraculous things not visible to our naked (or spectacled) eyes. Amazement never dims from year to year as the glass is held above the straight parallel sori of aspleniums, the round dots of these on woodferns, the hit-and-miss pattern on the walking fern. It is just as fine for flowers, too, showing their intricate parts, often of unbelievable design and color. The common Queen Anne's Lace -- left over from August in ever smaller size, turns to magic under the hand lens.

Everywhere, spice bush berries are turning bright red but the leaves are not yet yellow. Here, too, there is a lot of jewel weed, quite pretty now, and snakeroot with the puffs of feathery white blossoms, brown-eyed Susans and little asters of many kinds are just beginning to bloom. In damp corners along the trail the dainty Grass of Parnassus raises its beautiful creamy flower with the pin stripes on its five petals and closed gentians with their deep blue flowers which never open and look like arrested buds the shape of Christmas tree lights. Once there were a number of fringed gentians too, so indescribably beautiful but we have found none yet this year.

As we leave the woods trail and reach the sunny area at the top of the old road we find the very tall goldenrod we like the best for its graceful symmetrical heads of deep yellow. There is a large colony of sumac here with the strange clumps of rust-colored berries but still with green leaves. A lot of wild grape

festoons some of the trees here and tho we should probably pull it down, it is graceful indeed as the long tips hang and sway in the breeze. Thistles are here with their purple flowers, ripening elderberries on large bushes and pokeberries with their red-stemmed pointed clusters of button-like berries shaded from green at the tip to shiny red purple.

Woodbine creeps along the ground in the shade and in the sun but its leaves in fives are still green. Very soon it will be the first real brilliance of fall as it shows its presence on the tallest trees and hides the sad nakedness of many a dead elm.

Now, nearing the more civilized areas of the Meeting House and Herb Garden, we see September marigolds and zinnias in full swing, and the herb plants — some too large, some always neat and some just becoming respectable again after the last shearing. It is the right day for gathering cooking herbs for drying (if there were time) but also the right day for enjoying them where they are with their varied shades of green and silver gray, and their strong pleasant fragrances.

Rose plants are still giving a few lovely blossoms and the species along the east and south sides of the parking lot are colorful with their red or orange hips among the bright green leaves. Colorful, too, are the little apples of the Asiatic crabs — some fairly large and round and red, some smaller with a rosy blush or yellowish in color, some tiny - each kind distinctive and a September bonus after their flowering of May. The sun is warm now, insects hum and butterflies are about. Leaves are very still. Snow-white clouds are moving across a deeper blue sky but more slowly now. Lawns are very green. Perhaps summery September heat will not return. Perhaps colder September weather like that of later fall will come soon and we know the color change is imminent. But right now everything seems to be quietly waiting. It is a perfect mid-September day, entirely peaceful.

* * * * *

OCTOBER

"Living color" — "The magic world of color". These are telling phrases it would have been nice to coin. But my name isn't Disney, so I did not think of them. For a long time, my store of quotations about autumn has been growing and pointing to a little treatise on October color. But now that we are surrounded with it, living in it, and nearly at the year's height of it, there seem no adequate words at all. Perhaps there are none.

For some time now, single leaves have been picked up as they twist and float to the Fernwood paths, each a marvel of blending or contrasting color — a big sycamore leaf of dull gold with the veins in shaded green, deeper toward the stem; a small maple leaf intricately mottled or marked in complimentary colors of red and green; a dogwood or a sumac leaf with too many colors to count, all perfectly blended from tip to stem. Each single leaf is like the whole tree in miniature and each tree adds its bit to the October scene. How then, could there be enough words for all of it? Just the names of many of the colors are magic in themselves and merely to say or read them brings lovely pictures to mind: amethyst, ruby, emerald; citron, colbalt, crimson; terra-cotta, amber, bronze; olive-green, sage-green, scarlet; purple, mauve, lilac — a kaleidoscope of beauty tumbles thru your mind.

To be color blind or even partially color blind would seem a fate almost as hard as real blindness. Can you imagine what it would be on an October day to step into the woods or ride thru the country and see only shades of grey? How many of our blessings we take for granted and forget to be grateful!

This is not the time for polishing silver nor reading books nor sleeping. Every daylight hour this time of year should be spent out of doors — in the country, if possible, exchanging sidewalk and pavement for leafy paths. If you cannot go to the country, at least step outside your own door into the crisp clear air. The blue sky will be there and some bright tree and leaves on the ground.

We often wonder how all this change comes about in such a short time. One day we are in mid-summer and all is green. Unexpectedly a leaf or small branch is tinged with gold or red. Then, in no time at all, our whole world is bathed in luminous, unbelievable color — and before we've had enough time to revel in it, the ground is carpeted and tree branches are bare! How does it happen?

Wedges of geese moving across the sky; Monarch butterflies flitting by giving no hint of their long hazardous journey; misty mornings, sunny noons, chilly nights; katydids and crickets cheerful and constant; black hordes of chattering grackles making a noisy to-do about their gathering; cattails and milkweed sending wisps of seed-weighted fuzz thru the air; showers of bright leaves — all this and much more in October.

NOVEMBER

November in our climate is a month of many moods. Its days can hold the haunting remnants of crisp and beautiful October, or the balmy air and blue skies of Indian Summer, or as we have just seen here the past few days, a real foretaste of winter beauty and winter weather now lurking just around the corner.

Fewer folks think of taking a walk in November than do in spring and earlier fall, but there is refreshment of spirit waiting in the woodland paths, and peace and certainty and quiet, all of these things so necessary if we are to know tranquillity in our days of rush and stress and changing values. I propose we all play hooky this time, forget the work and just go for a walk — take a turn around the familiar woods paths and see what we can see. There will be few birds, we know before we start, and fewer flowers, with only a scampering squirrel, the plop of a black walnut or butternut as it hits the ground or the rustle of crisp oak leaves to break the silence. In October we were surrounded, surfeited with color — exciting, vivid, unbelievable color; very short-lived. Now instead, on the same paths, we are surrounded by almost total silence; leaves are brown and dry.

Yet some color lingers. As we leave the house, we revel in the brillance of the long border of fragrant sumac. After most branches are bare and their millions of leaves have fallen to make the winter blanket, this fine shrub just begins to think about changing its green for every hue and shade of yellow to bright and dark reds. The sweetgum above it is a marvel of changing color, too, and in its prime beauty right now. An artist could hardly think of all the colors sometimes found in the leaves of one small branch — the same yellows and scarlet and, in addi-

tion, the richest maroon and mahogany brown imaginable. Another fiery spot is off toward the Meeting House — the flame bush which seemed yesterday to burn thru the unexpected cloak of snow. But we aren't going in that direction, we're heading this time for the woods path to the river. Perhaps when we come back there may be time for another glimpse of a lone alpine gentian, a pink violet, small daisy, a few out-of-season japonica primrose blossoms in the Rock Garden. We know they are there, for we saw them just before the snow caught them unaware. One day last week when the temperature was near 60 degrees, they popped out, thinking it might be spring.

Starting down the familiar log steps, we find that thick leaves cover the bulblet ferns but the bright green fronds of hartstongue rise thru them. How sturdy, how healthy they are in this spot where the everflowing springs which keep them so, are now also hidden by leaves. Woodferns are still mostly green and the bank of Christmas ferns is as always a joyous sight, for we know that thruout the coming winter they will remain this same deep shining green no matter what the weather. How different the curled drooping royal ferns, now brown and sad, which in summer were so graceful along the edge of the Frog Pond.

As we wander on down, it is sycamore leaves that cover steps and paths, most of them a soft tan-brown but some still tinged with green and yellow. Wild ginger with the shape of violet leaves, poke up thru the brown carpet and are still quite green. So, too, are those of hepatica and Jacob's ladder, tho the Jack-in-the-pulpit, and their relatives the green dragons, can be located now only by their seed pods — clusters of polished red berries which look exactly alike. I'm told even an expert can not tell them apart at this stage after the leaves have disappeared.

On down, and we are met at the pool's edge by the big old rainbow trout expecting to be fed. They seem to be enjoying this November day tho we always wonder how they can be adjusted to living in the very cold water. And how can the forget-me-nots take it? Their roots are in the bank, but the fresh green branches spread ever farther out into the chilly water. They

look as tho they should be in bloom, but that would be too much to ask.

In all the years we have lived here, the wonder of everflowing water has never dimmed. As it spills over the outlet of this pool, it makes the first tumbling splash we have heard. The next splash is over the railroad ties which bank up the cattail marsh where gaunt stems of Joe Pye weed, ironweed and boneset not yet cut down by winter snows and wind, stand straight, their dark brown leaves drooping down to clasp their stems. Below them the patch of watercress is green and tempting. Here the red hips of the marsh wild rose give a bit of color and big hollow grey stalks of angelica are broken off at different heights.

Near the river, slim yellow leaves of willow strew the paths and a jungle of equisetum stretches into all the wet places. Dogwoods show the flat button-shaped buds which raise our hopes for spring bloom to come.

Passing by the boathouse and the other spot of tumbling water, we can find some leaves of the birdfoot violets if we look closely. As we scuffle along in the oak leaves, we regret that we missed altogether the bright carpet of huckleberries we might

have seen here last month. By now most leaves are down, vistas open up again thru the bare branches. Even the grove of paw-paws, so jungle-like with their big leaves a short time ago, are stiff and bare. Across the rough road, the many seed pods of bladdernut dangle and blow about, audibly rattling their seeds.

Now we have reached our favorite little waterfall named "Corkscrew" when we came. Few can resist at least a brief pause on this bridge of two seats. One can be mesmerized into forgetting cares and doubts and problems by the sight of the never-ceasing flow of water over the rocks. And what a lovely sound!

Nearby, the many marginal ferns are green, more noticeable and valuable now among brown surroundings than they were with the green competition of summer.

Enjoying the day, and the walk, it has been all along quite impossible to refrain from thinking ahead to spring and remembering back to summer and other seasons past. One month or one season cannot exist by and for itself alone, it seems, any more than one person or one nation can.

THE CABIN
A Rendezvous With the Past

Well hidden from the casual visitor, there is a trail leading up the steep hill from the Meeting House, but few follow it to the cabin except curious children with swift strong legs. From its original purpose, a playhouse for grandchildren, which it served for many years, it turned to be a place of escape. Few and precious were the days when I could afford the time to pack a lunch and stationery or sewing and disappear for an hour or two.

After several years, today I am here again. A view of river, fields and lawns stretches away far below. The trees are taller and as straight as the telephone poles they might have become if they had grown elsewhere. The pines give it the look and feel of the mountains.

The little "old hickory" bench I sat on long ago is still here having weathered many a winter snow and rain storm. The small hickory rocker is here, too, so the porch is well furnished. But the chairs inside are pretty bad — old canvas chairs visiting children had painted one year.

Two of the original decorations are still hanging on the wall — a little wooden shelf made in an early grade by Bob — and the head of an Indian chief which he hammered in brass long ago in a camp time, I believe. The brass is cracking and dull, but the feathers on the chief's head dress are still easily discernable.

Not visited for such a long time, this old cabin stirs many memories today.

* * * * *

As year after year the number of grandchildren visiting here increased, someone (we have all forgotten who) had the bright

idea of a log cabin playhouse for them — one far removed from all the water and big enough to house all of them on a rainy day.

So Bob drew a plan — there would be one room with a little front porch and cantelever roof — built into the eastern hillside, the front supported by posts much as cabins are built in the mountains.

All the children were excited and eager to help. Oak boards were ordered and delivered about where the bench is now in the present herb garden. It turned out to be green rather than seasoned lumber and nobody had any conception of the impossible job it would be to lug all of it up that very steep hill to the site chosen.

The first erroneous idea was that it would be thrown together and ready to use in a weekend. Instead, it took several weekends of our more regular family visitors from nearby Niles, Valparaiso and River Forest plus a whole vacation week of the eastern family. There was loud and continual wailing from them about coming so far to rest and then being forced to spend the whole time in back breaking labor.

Not only was the green oak very heavy, it was practically impervious to any kind of nails. Arms as well as backs ached after conquering each nail and getting it in as far as its head!

There was much good natured banter and with Bob to push and oversee the work, there finally came the day when it was finished, a broom and dustpan could be hung up as a sign that housekeeping was expected, a cot, a chair and small table were carried up, a few pictures put on the walls, poison ivy removed from immediate environs – and we were ready for "the opening". Trevor was the oldest of the children and able to write the invitation to a few family friends. They were signed by the others and her mark made by the youngest.

All day the little girls were very busy with the flowers and refreshments lemonade and graham crackers spread with frosting. Even the simplest preparations were not easy because of the difficulty of getting everything up there. Not only was the hill nearly straight up and down but the cover of fallen pine needles

made it very slippery indeed. For each step up there were usually three steps slipped backward.

The invited friends, all good sports, came dressed up and were welcomed and guided up the hill by the children. Then a surprise for all of us. Before passing the refreshments, from the tallest to the littlest they lined up on the hillside in front of the porch and sang new words to the tune of "I've Been Working on the Railroad" which my sister had written and taught them that day:

We've been working in our cabin
All the live-long day
We're glad to greet you in our cabin
Tho not finished all the way.

We hope you'll come to see us often
'Cause here's where we'll hang out
Here we do just what we want to
— Even yell and shout!

Chorus

We will always love our cabin
We will always love it, we know
We will always love our cabin
And we *THANK YOU ALL* who made it so!

After that, tho the attention of John and Todd could not for very long be diverted from fish in the Pond, the cabin for a few years was a favorite place on a rainy day for they carried their

lunches, a thermos bottle of milk, crayons, paper, pencils and decks of cards with them — and the houses below were oh, so quiet for some time!

As more and more of them grew up and acquired new interests, the cabin was used less and less but, weathered now, it still stands as sturdy as ever and on a perfect fall day like this one, is a ready-made retreat for writing and looking and remembering — completely hidden away from telephones and people . . . Not only is it a day off, but a day off in the hills. With the very tall pines whispering all around and the carpet of fallen needles and oak leaves on the steep slope in front of this little cabin porch, it is easy to pretend I'm sitting on a hill in the mountains. Really quite a place, Fernwood, when in a very few minutes from lush ferns and swampy ground near the river it can offer the illusion of high places in the mountains! It's only too bad that this spot, so high and quiet, isn't enjoyed more often, especially now that kind workers have made it accessible by a wide (golf-cart-wide) path from the top, to replace the stiff steep climb from the bottom.

Once more the truth strongly impressed today - so relaxing, so different - is that perhaps the most precious things about life, which passes so swiftly, are the memories left along the way which return later, unbidden, for pleasant reflection. This little old cabin, nearly empty, is packed full of them. If for no other reason than to relive them, it should be visited more frequently — especially on an autumn day — made to order for roaming and resting and remembering.

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A DAY TO REMEMBER

On such a perfect autumn day, it seems right to be lazy — to loiter as we wander along the trail as far as the trout pool — to rest on the little two-winged bench by the tree. This one always jogs our memories.

With both of us working at wartime jobs it was indeed cause for jubilation one morning to hear by radio that it was actually V-E Day — a day we had been waiting and praying for for so long. While this truth was sinking into our understanding we decided simultaneously that on this significant day, so important to us and to all parents of soldiers everywhere as well as to the soldiers themselves, we *must* do something special — make some small Fernwood improvement with materials at hand which we could always point to and say — "We did that on V-E Day." Perhaps a bench by the tree at the west bank of the Fish Pool? We found some cedar posts and the post hole digger and two boards, so work began. The seat boards and one cedar support have had to be replaced but there it is still, looking exactly the same as when we celebrated that happy V-E Day by building it. The forget-me-nots then and now at pool's edge reaching into the water always speak of Barbara who helped to plant them there.

Another later memory of this spot comes always to mind as we sit here today. The old rainbow trout which were enjoying this pool when we moved here, were growing huge, slow and tired. Nearly every day one more had a hole pecked into its side. My dad thought the culprit, whether bird or beast, might be discouraged by a man sitting on our pool-edge V-E Day bench. Accordingly, he made a scarecrow complete with boots, a straw hat and a fishing pole. Day and night he sat there amusing all who came by. But new holes in different fish continued to appear. One morning I packed up books and papers and seated myself at the base of the sycamore about twenty-five feet from the immobile fake fisherman. I expected to see a great blue heron swoop down to attack a fish. But he fooled me. Instead of alighting by the pool's edge, he floated to a landing far below — in the cattail marsh. Scarcely breathing, I was fascinated to see him turn his head this way and that, then walk deliberately all the way up the log steps and path, pause at the edge, give a sharp turn of his head to look at the motionless fisherman and step into the clear water! A picture etched in memory!

wm Blackmun
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Winter

DECEMBER

December, until the shortest day is reached, is rightfully a part of fall. But for us at Fernwood it seems more correctly the first month of winter. When the year is divided into four equal parts of three months each, one part for each season, December has to be the first of winter, March the first of three for spring, June for summer and September for fall, equinox and the solstice notwithstanding.

The last of November, as far as weather goes, carries into the first part of December with grey skies usually looking snow filled, tho sometimes several days pass before it actually falls. With Thanksgiving past, thoughts turn solidly now to preparations for Christmas — every little while hearing reminders on T.V. or radio telling how many (or how few) shopping days remain before Christmas. They only make matters worse for we already know how time flies.

Similar warnings and our own time schedule in the years of Fernwood Greens were more crucial and when weather was uncooperative also, we could be thrown into a near panic. During all those days when we were wiring green wreaths day after day after day, we liked it best when a fine snow constantly fell and, sifting thru the screens, kept the wreaths stacked on the porch floor as fresh as the day the greens had been cut. The air-filled snow outside, the birds active at the feeders, the red bows and cone supplies inside — all these made the holiday work quite festive and fitting – and it was too early to begin to worry about getting the boxes shipped out.

But just let the thermometer drop and the snow begin to drift and pile up so that our road was difficult or impassable

for getting workers in and products out, then we had a hard time to keep from getting tense and falling behind schedule. Usually we worked through and out of our weather problems but a few left indelible nightmares. For instance, this quote from one year's shipping experience:

"Then that day one awful year when on the first scheduled day for shipping greens the thermometer stood at 10 degrees below zero - and must have been at least 20 degrees below in the cement room! We worried about ourselves but even more about the holly and winterberry! Many workers couldn't get there, or stay to stand it, or were sick at home.

"Of the eleven, after lunch, only four of us were left — and nearly one hundred boxes to go! Never has anything looked so impossible. We started but we wanted to stop and get warm or stop and sit down or just stop. It was so miserably slow — only four to do what usually kept eleven busy. But we finally made it. Utterly weary, we took Mar home then fought cold winds and blowing snow on the walk down our road. I slipped and fell into the deep snow and really begged to just be left there. As frozen people are wont to feel, I thot the height of bliss would be to just go to sleep there. Alone, I'm sure I'd have done just that. But by sheer brute force Walter pulled me up and we stumbled on with numbed feet and legs and finally reached home and bed. A good thing we had finished the boxes. None of us could have faced it again the next morning."

This and other equally harrowing experiences make any adjustments we have to make to weather in December 1974 seem child's play and simple indeed. Our memory of those November and December days for many years is that we were always cold. We couldn't be comfortably warm while working, for that would be very bad for the greens and berries. And anyway, the Summer House just didn't ever get or stay comfortably warm if it was cold outside. And it always was.

Perhaps no others reading this will or can really appreciate being warm unless they were some who helped with greens

work! A simple thing like staying in out of a storm, putting on warm, dry, *clean* clothes, going to the Post Office during the day rather than at midnight — all these are simple blessings usually taken for granted but really looked upon as appreciated luxuries by those who survived the greens.

Thru the month, the tempo of shopping, making, wrapping, delivering, decorating, cooking, baking and cleaning — rises and rises, pointing always to the holiday season and Christmas day - happiest always in homes where there are children (or adults, sometimes) who still believe in magic, in love, in the story of Christmas. The whirlwind or its aftermath continues thru the remaining few days of December — a time for family, for friends, for walking in the crisp winter air. We'll find the birds have survived the holidays and we have, too, and at first it is hard to think of taking down the tree and other decorations and of putting everything away for the same happy build-up twelve months away.

* * * * *

The Christmas woods are quiet
The sky and birds are grey
The brook looks black in soft white banks
As it goes its endless way.

We like these country winters
When burning hearth-logs glow,
When chores are done and weeds are gone
And our road fills up with snow.

But, tramping snowy stream sides
Our mind's eye — once and again —
Turns cold and cheerless branches bare
Into blossomy boughs in the rain.

Sees violets spread their carpet
'Neath ferns' uncoiling fronds;
We think we hear the wood thrush sing,
And frogs in all the ponds.

Now ice-bound woods break silence,
The sky's like a bluebird's wing,
The moss edged stream reflects green lace
And echoes the songs of spring.

JANUARY

In January our usual sentiment, often voiced, is "Let it snow." And it usually does. Now that Christmas is over and Fernwood work can be done anywhere that is inside, it can snow every day, as far as we are concerned. In case of a crippling storm in the night there is always a basket of books or papers from the office — enough to fill several days — and there is something very cozy about being closed in by the weather thru no fault of our own! Of course, this is true only now that we no longer have to get out to a job or a school as we did for so many years and while we are hugging the fire in the hearth and enjoying some of the compensations of "getting old", we always think and speak of those who are younger and less lucky. "Do you think they are winning the battle against snow drifts in New Jersey and New York or getting blocked on a bad ride from home to office?" "And the dirtier snow recently packed into Chicago suburbs — do you think they got out of their piled-high driveway and into the snarled traffic of snowy and icy streets?" We can always telephone to find out — and often do. At least we don't worry about snow for our Texas folks. More likely we hear each night that temperature there has been "the highest in the nation."

We could probably ruin our day by thinking of all the millions of people "out there" everywhere battling the weather, some sick, some even hungry, but this won't help them, we realize, so we settle back to our chairs by the fire, grateful that we don't *have* to get out. The only better days I can remember are those when an early morning radio listed the schools "closed because of the storm" and we could *all* settle down to favorite occupations.

This protection of four walls so much enjoyed might be from the fury of a blizzard with wind-driven snow hitting the window panes and everything in its path with sharp stinging force almost like small-sized hail. Blinding, crippling is this kind of storm. As we look out of windows first on one side of the house and then on another, we wonder how the trees and shrubs can take it. Sometimes they can't and heavily iced branches piled with snow often snap off with a sharp retort.

January is the month when this kind of frightening blizzard can be expected. But January can also turn its other side and we are not surprised some mornings to wake up to a world so beautiful after an all night gentle snow as to be unreal. Everywhere there is a smooth shining padding of white. It stretches as far in every direction as eye can see — not a ripple in it anywhere and so far not even tracks of man or bird or animal to break its shiny surface. Every twig and branch and weed is coated and loaded with soft white — a fairyland to dream of and no wind yet to shake it off. We look and look, first out one window and then another, and cannot really believe or absorb so much perfection and silence and utter peace. As we look the sun comes out briefly and changes the white fairyland to one of sparkling, dancing beauty, unreal and unbelievable. Perhaps it is a day like this — beautiful outside and so cozy inside – that pushes January way up next to May as perhaps my second favorite month — tho, of course, we can't forget October. It's up there somewhere, also, near the top.

Before long, this scene which we have tried to bottle forever in memory, must change. A little wind and a little more snow knock the loose fluff from the branches so they begin to look as tho hit with little wads of cotton. This stage is interesting, too, and still clean and white, but the complete perfection of the early morning has been broken and we can settle back to work.

With either type of snow storm and many other kinds between, a miracle not always remembered is that whether the snow is piled up by a driving wind or floats quietly to its

place on the ground, the "white stuff" is made up of millions upon millions — no, trillions and quadrillions — of individual flakes, each one a mite of perfection and each an individual and perfect design of a six-sided crystal! This is just one of the many, many unbelievable miracles of our natural world. Why or how can anything be as fragile, as perfect, as brief, as a snowflake? To try to study them is as frustrating as it is inspiring. As soon as one is caught on a sleeve or mitten — and almost as soon as it is seen in its intricate design, it is gone. Millions of different designs – frail, beautiful and fleeting — all different, all six-sided. Has anyone the reason or the explanation of how this can be so?

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No one could count the times we've climbed
These steps now hid in snow —
At dawn or dusk, by full-moon light,
At dark by flashlight glow.

Perhaps we've had a river ride
Or maybe fed the fish,
Or planted things or watched a bird —
To have more time, our wish.

Whate'er the hour or reason be
This favorite path we roam,
We always find new wonders here
Before we get back home.

The fireflies on summer nights,
Snow crystals when it's cold,
Bright leaves in fall, and in the spring
A million buds unfold!

FEBRUARY

Always a short month, it seems far shorter than just the absence of a 30th or 31st and usually a 29th day marked on the calendar. Perhaps it is because as long as January is present the winter seems surely with us, but when it is gone, February indeed will lead to spring. Our real winter days are drawing to a close. There will be days of snow, we know, and more days by the fire, but they are not so certain now and some day along in February the snow protection which we like to have on our plants everywhere will draw back and there will be the sudden appearance of winter aconite in protected pockets of the Rock Garden. We aren't quite ready for this yet, no matter how surprising they are, and will be glad when they are again snow covered and hope it will be soon. Perhaps the difference is that in January we feel settled into expected winter and make the most of the short days with a feeling they will go on and on. In February we know the winter days are numbered and we'd better hurry and finish winter jobs to be ready when the spring thaws come, bringing with them their own brand of pleasure and the first desire to be out and looking about for early signs of spring. February seems a sandwiched month – caught between January's certain winter and March's early spring. The ground hog is indeed fun to meet on a winter's walk, but the old superstition that when he sees his shadow on a sunny day and doesn't on a cloudy one, the projection of six more weeks or not of winter weather has always seemed twisted – the opposite, more logical.

Even if the month is cold, changes are felt if not seen. The winter birds are having an easier time at the feeders and seem to know a change is imminent. The cardinal's coat grows

brighter and before the month is out his will be the first real song of spring – a happy change from his winter call notes.

Most of the other birds which have spent the winter are the little greyish ones — the sparrows and juncos and snowbirds – but there's a feeling in the air that others brighter will soon be joining them after distant and often perilous journeys from their warmer climes.

There are other changes coming, too. We know this even when we spend much of the day inside. The willows and the shrub dogwoods are increasing the color of their stems and we know that sap is rising, tho why or how we cannot fathom. Buds are swelling to make pussy willows. Red osier branches add color to the Main Garden borders and to wet places enjoyed on every ride thru the country. As a contrast, the yellow twig dogwoods near them become a light bright yellow and we have added here a third winter stem color – the bright green of kerrias. Tho the leaves and blossoms of all these are enjoyed later, the prime mission of all of them is found in February when they brighten up an otherwise rather drab scene.

February is that strange time of year when we feel more than see the spring things we are waiting for. Our backs are now finally turned on the winter just past and we face the spring when there will be no more time for sitting by a fire — and every daylight hour will hold new miraculous surprises, new flowers opening, new birds arriving, new duties to tackle. It is well that February, a quieter but shorter month, leads us into all this gradually.

* * * * *

TIME

"To everything there is a season and
a time to every purpose under heaven"
— Ecclesiastes

Many will remember "Time Marches On" as the title of a popular and long-running radio news broadcast before the days of television. This is indeed a stark truth borne ever more clearly upon all of us — and the familiar cliche may be added that the older we get the faster it marches. Sometimes its stride seems cruel and ruthless. We cannot stop it nor slow it no matter how much we might wish to.

December is the month for bustling activity, almost frantic at times, a confusion of ribbons and colored paper, of tree ornaments and greens, of cookies and fruit cake, sleighbells and snow storms - all mounting and pointing to the magic day of Christmas.

Just as pleasant, and surely a contrast, January is the time for packing up the tinsel and trimmings, for getting back on an even keel, for cleaning desk drawers, catching up on the mending and making resolutions. On the first January days it is almost automatic to think back on the year just past and contemplate what lies ahead. Sometimes, in so doing, there's nostalgia; sometimes a little dread; often, regret and resolve.

It can be frightening to realize that another year has slipped away, but it should be heartening that a new one is at the threshold, for it is a thought to wrestle with that any wasted day or hour or quarter hour is gone and will never return to give us another chance.

We are all given the same amount — twenty-four hours in each day. It is up to each individual to say how it is spent and where.

We are not all alike (and this is good), so no one should judge another's "wasted" time. What seems wasted time to one may be relaxation and chance for meditation for another. Frantic and rewarding activity for one looks like silly antics to someone else. Time spent in strenuous and healthful exercise for the young might be better spent in resting for the oldster!

Twenty-four hours each day has been given to the unhappy, unfair, unrealistic, bearded youths across our land seemingly intent only on disruption and forgetful of the benefits and responsibilities of being an American. The same amount, twenty-four hours a day, has been given to those other Americans so far removed, those fine, intelligent, courageous, young men who so recently lifted our spirits by their amazing trip around the moon in a technologically faultless, humanly perfect accomplishment. They measured and planned their time and it came out to the second.

Very few are endowed with the ability, training and stamina for such a world-acclaimed feat, but everyone can evaluate his activities and, to a certain extent at least, plan his time. Often it seems beyond our control that too large a percentage of time is used up in the pressure of the "daily grind", or we are caught in a treadmill of little unimportant things. Much time for many of our years must be spent in school or in wage earning, but always, if we want it badly enough, we can find some time for the quieter things, the enriching things.

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Epilogue

One could not ask more than the assurance that lessons learned from simple country living, that peace and contentment absorbed and inner resources sharpened here had indeed enriched the lives of our children (three) and our grandchildren (twelve). And may Rachel and Jennifer one day know Fernwood, too.

What better epilogue could there be, then, than the confirming words of one of them, Don, in his contribution to our "Notes" of November 1973 . . .

THE HERITAGE THAT IS FERNWOOD
by Don Boydston

The logical starting place is Fernwood, itself; for within its boundaries, its streams, ponds and woods, on its lawns and on the river, much that I am came to be.

Fernwood has changed since that day in early 1942 when it became the family homestead. But simply to look back over thirty years of assorted memories and happenings would be boring in the extreme for all but close family and friends. Instead, look with me at the heritage that is Fernwood.

In a real sense Fernwood has always belonged to all of us; from family to occasional visitor to charter member; from part-time gardener to Madam Director. Although her stamp is everywhere, Kay is the first to acknowledge that Fernwood, a labor of love, exists only for the enjoyment and education of any who would enter the gate. I have benefited more than most.

Though my own home is no longer 'country' pre-fixed, the lessons of Fernwood influence me still; and, I suspect, always will.

While I cannot state with certainty that I might not have developed an understanding of natural phenomena in another environment, I am sure it could not have been as deep and abiding.

The uncounted hours invested quietly exploring the back-washes and small protected tributaries of the St. Joe River in a flat-bottomed duck boat pay dividends to this day. When people talk of the importance of clean water to our future, I still remember the flotsam and filth that was such a normal part of the river. Today I can see how much cleaner the water is; but while I ask "Is that all we can do in thirty years?" I have recognized man's limitations in hurrying a natural process and I remind myself to be patient. That has been one heritage of Fernwood.

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I have seen first hand the fury of a tornado in a swath cut cleanly through the original twelve acres of Fernwood - so straight that it might have been surveyed and cut with chain saws. It was my first remembered exposure to the limitless power of nature.

In contrast, less than a year later, the first atomic bomb signified the start of man's most recent quest for self-designated omnipotence. But, like Don Quixote, we joust at windmills if we think we can control or outperform nature. The fact is that the fury of just one ordinary summer thunder shower exceeds the power of a thousand Hiroshima bombs.

So I learned humility in the knowledge of our Creator's power, still another heritage of Fernwood.

* * * * *

A recently renewed interest in close-up photography . . . primarily insects and flowers . . . has brought me 'close' to nature

even in the suburbs. Each slide depicting the intricate design of a butterfly's wing, or the enlarged veining of the plainest leaf, reminds me of lessons learned long ago at Fernwood. The perfection found in the natural world . . . from the smallest microorganism to the limitless reaches of outer space . . . is, at least in the narrow range visible to the naked eye, evidenced all around us. I learned to be an observer . . . a witness . . . to the miracles wrought in the creation we take so for granted. Another heritage of Fernwood that I treasure.

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One of the most valuable lessons to be learned by anyone is the worth of Work good old-fashioned physical hard work! Though some might say I learned to avoid work while growing up at Fernwood. I can't agree, for by example . . . if not by deed . . . I absorbed this lesson. Twenty-five years later, at the 'Our Favorite Farm' of my columns, I was able to pass this heritage of Fernwood on to my own children. (I told them it was good for their character!)

* * * * *

I couldn't help thinking of some of these things during a recent trip to Fernwood.

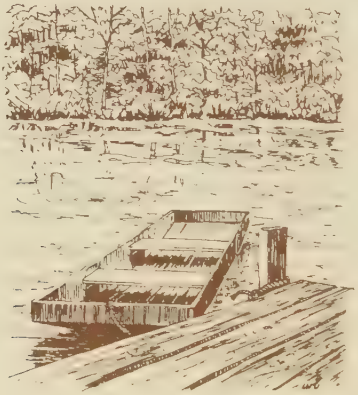
As I viewed the expanse of lawn that falls away from the Meeting House patio, I didn't see grass or flowering shrubs or colorful borders; I 'saw' an asparagus field; neat rows of thick green shoots that too soon for the available help (but *NEVER* too soon for me) turned to high wispy plants marking the end of the season. To this day I dislike asparagus.

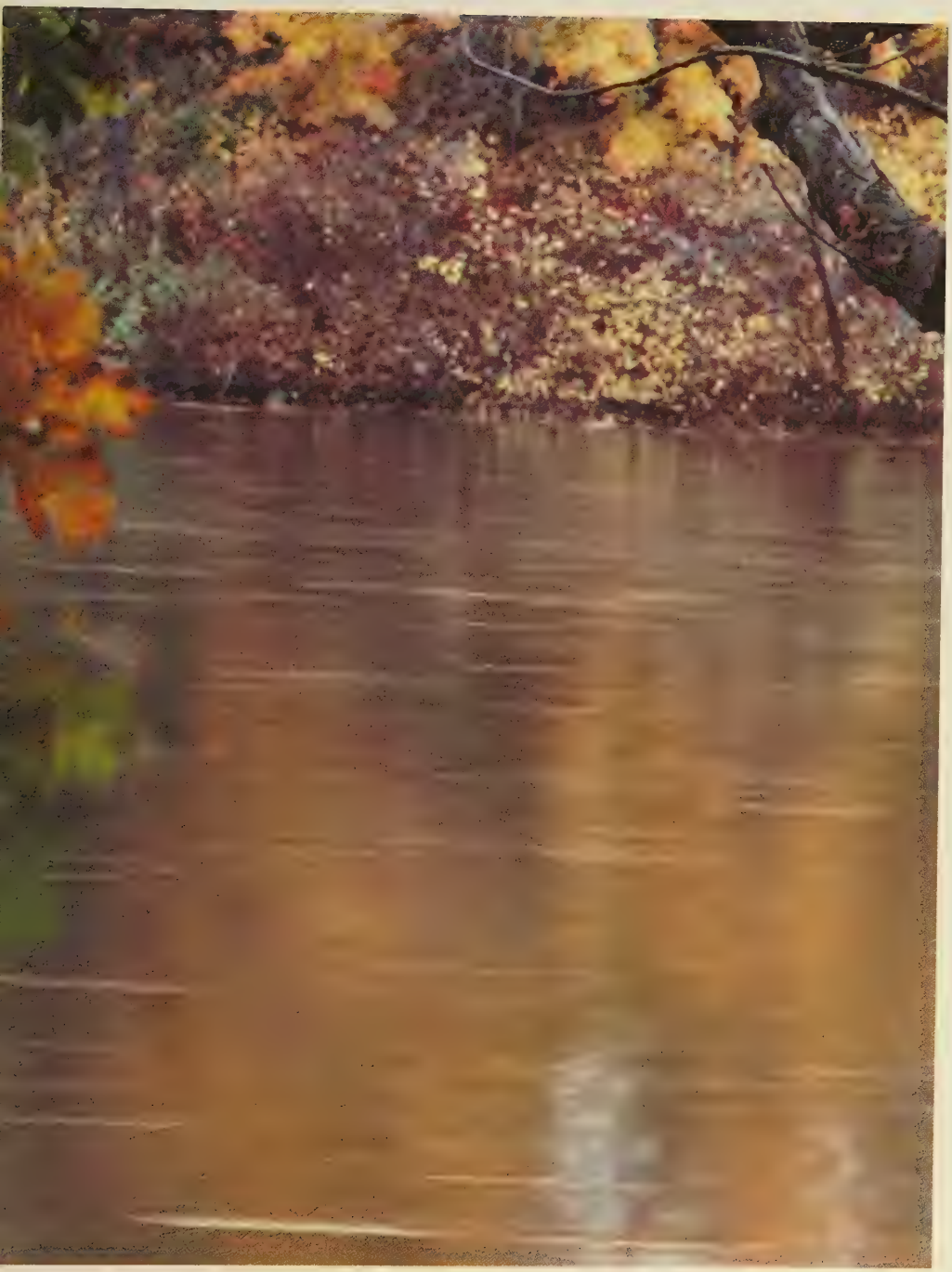
Looking up the hill from the east door of the Meeting House, I could see the tall pines that surround the grave dug so long ago . . . with love and tears . . . for a boy's dog, Spotty, that died under the wheels of a farmer's car.

The perennial garden near the Summer House was once a tennis court. I can still visualize the old gravel surface, rough

and broken with disuse; the rusty chicken-wire backstop, torn and hanging. One supporting post did double duty and was topped with a martin house. It had long since seen its last martin and was, instead, the home of a family of flying squirrels. Have you ever seen a squirrel 'fly'? I did then, but never have since.

Someone has remarked that no matter how things change, they remain the same. Fernwood has changed since 1942, but one thing remains the same: each one . . . young and old . . . who visits there can benefit from the heritage that is Fernwood.





Kay Boydston

So much to learn. So much to enjoy. So little time. These are the driving forces of her every day. Yet no one understands better than Kay the importance of a quiet moment on a woodland bench, a pause to revel in the song of a wood thrush, to marvel at the pattern of sori on a fern frond, to enjoy the sparkle of fireflies all about.

She considers herself very fortunate to live where there are many favorite places filled with favorite plants added over the years; where she can welcome favorite people — family and friends; where she can still indulge in her favorite occupations of planting, studying and certain craft activities; where in short, there is always more needing to be done than twice the available time will allow.

Frances H. Higgins